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WOMAN

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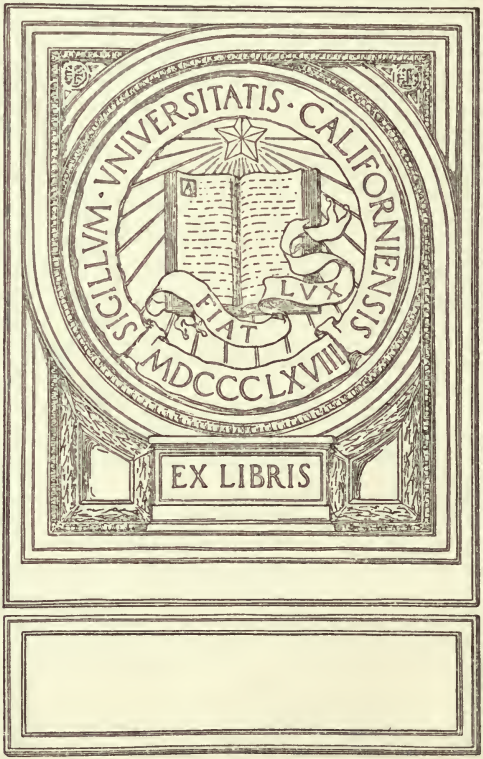

WOMAN.

A Poem.

BY

JAMES W. WARD.

Read before the Graduating Class of the Female College of Ohio at their Commencement Exercises, July 17 1852, and published by request of the Trustees.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

The Ohio Female College, an institution possessing chartered collegiate powers, is located at College Hill, a few miles north of Cincinnati. The Hon. John McLean is President of the Board of Trustees, and Rev. John Covert, A.M., President of the Faculty. The annual examination and graduation of the Senior Class, for the year 1852, took place in the College Chapel, on the 17th of July.

After the usual exercises by the members of the Class, an Address, characterized by earnestness of manner and appropriateness of thought and subject, was delivered by Manning F. Force, Esq., of Cincinnati. The Poem, to which the following Correspondence has reference, was then read by the author: —

College Hill, July 25, 1852.

Jas. W. Ward, Esq.:

Dear Sir, — Having listened with pleasure to the very interesting Poem read by yourself at the late Anniversary of the Ohio Female College, we would respectfully solicit a copy of the same for publication.

Yours, with respect,

[Signed]

John McLean,
Saml. W. Fisher,
J. K. Glenn,
John Covert.

CORRESPONDENCE.

Cincinnati, July 30, 1852.

GENTLEMEN:

I am gratified that the Poem I had the honor of reading before your late graduating class, meets with your approbation, and accede to your request for its publication; not, however, without an unaffected apprehension, that public criticism will have less consideration for my temerity than the generous partiality of personal friends. But "the purpose must weigh with the folly," and the manuscript is at your disposal.

Nec quo, nec quomodo, sed quorsum.

It is proper to say, that the Poem was originally prepared for, and read before the Young Men's Mercantile Library Association of this city. By several additions and modifications, it was adapted to the purpose for which you desired it, and is now presented as read at your Institution.

With deference and respect,

Your servant,

JAS W. WARD.

Hon. JOHN MCLEAN,
S. W. FISHER, etc.,
Trustees.

TO

HIS WIFE,

THE AUTHOR DEDICATES

THIS

TRIBUTE OF ESTEEM.

Beaucoup des gens sont la risée du public et croient en être l'admiration ; le bourdonnement de l'avide flagornerie cause seul leur erreur. — Celui-là ne sait point aimer les bonnes, qui ne hait pas les méchantes.

WOMAN.

I.

THE Muse's office* was by Heaven designed,
To please, improve, instruct, reform mankind:
Now, armed with wrath, she bids eternal shame,
With strictest justice, brand the villain's name;
Now, in the milder garb of ridicule,
She sports and pleases, while she wounds the fool;
Her style is often varied, but her aim,
To prop the cause of truth, is still the same.

Young ladies, up the perilous path that leads
From childhood's hopes to woman's graver deeds,
Thus far you have advanced, and much no doubt
Have learned, well worth your patient finding out;
And yet, perhaps, have little thought meanwhile,
Strong in your innocence, and by the smile

* Churchill.

And guardian hand of friendship still sustained,—
Have little thought, I say, with honesty unfeigned
And self-distrust, to search into yourselves
For germs of folly; as the florist delves
With prying earnestness into the soil
For grubs and noxious weeds, whose growth might spoil
The promise of his green and budding plants;
For wisdom, like the soil, her riches grants
To those alone, whose care and culture keep
The weeds of error down, and never sleep
Upon their duty. I am come to-day
To lead your thoughts awhile, as best I may,
Upon yourselves; or rather upon what
You may become, in life's uncertain lot.

II.

In history's wondrous volume you have read
How, by an importuning people led,
Or to their country's struggling fortunes tied,
Good men have toiled and suffered, striven and died,
Their land to honor, and their homes defend,
Their life at once the sacrifice and end;
How, on the strong uplifting tide embarked,
Pursuing fortune, or upholding right,
Cæsar, Columbus, Washington have marked
Successive ages of advancing light,—

Successive hours of that still brightening day,
Whose noontide sun shall yet, with cloudless ray,
Burst like the day-spring on the ransomed earth,
Its long predicted, glorious second birth.

You 've read of those whose vain inglorious claim
Would arrogate the world's great conqueror's name;
As Alexander and Napoleon, — men
Of brazen nerves, and hearts of steel, who then
Were happy most, when their marauding bands
Were desolating with death-dealing hands
Earth's fairest places; men of action made;
Types of their age; by no defeat delayed;
Who put the planet underneath their heel,
And made their half barbarian victims feel
Ambition's power, that like a tempest drives,
And on the ruin of the helpless thrives;—
Ambition, that rides down the poor and weak,
And sends its pirate hordes new fields to seek
Where fire and sword detested work may do,
To plunder and destroy the shrinking few;
O'er the broad earth its complicated path,
Cut with the sword, and trod in lust and wrath,
Is marked with ruins, ashes, bones and blood:
So rolls the tempest's devastating flood
O'er flowery fields, and cities carved in stone,—
So forests in the whirlwind's track are strown.

You 've heard how progress in the soul of man
Unfolds its broad and earth-redeeming plan ;
How light, with its divine effulgence, breaks
Upon the heart that with oppression aches—
That long the unjust burden has endured,
But leaps to learn its anguish may be cured.

You 've seen upon the globe's extended map,
How toward Columbia's green and flowery lap
The tribes of earth have long been wandering,
Like restless petrels, ever on the wing ;
How by some hopeful impulse onward driven,
Adventurous millions for new worlds have striven ;
Pushing in mighty columns toward the West,
Till the great globe is conquered and possessed.

And you have learned how great and strong can be
The human spirit, struggling to be free ;
How much the soul deceived and crushed can dare ;
How much privation, self-inflicted, bear ;
What weariness of heart, what weight of woe
An earnest, hopeful man can undergo,
To gain and hold what nature made his own,
Amenable to neither church nor throne,
That great first right, withheld by fraud and force,
That makes the conscience and the choice the source
Of every power by man on man conferred,
And every civil suffering incurred.

III.

The world 's a book where in a general story,
Man writes the record of his shame and glory;
And these great chapters you have now explored,
With startling lessons for the thinking stored:
Explored in part, not fully comprehended,
The narrative with life is scarcely ended.
But there's a subject whose importance weighs,
In statesman's logic or in poet's lays,
More than they all; and bears the proud behest,
To make humanity more pure and blest,
And man's celestial origin attest.
What were a thousand warriors, brave as he
Whose fate enlists all Freedom's sympathy,
Each with his banner and his tramping host,
Compelling tyranny from post to post?
What all their conquests, foe on foe subduing,
Falsehood and treachery to death pursuing?
What were reformers with their cherished dreams,
Their sapient prophecies and pleasing schemes,
Their equalizing maxims, scorn of kings,
Problems, and social life's remodelings —
What all their facts, however firmly fixed,
Howe'er with human progress blent and mixed?
What progress, in its overturning march
Knocking from custom's consecrated arch

The mossy key-stone ; with presuming hand
Prostrating ancient landmarks, gray and grand,
That like Palmyra's columns have withstood
Of revolutions a devouring flood ?
What were all these assumed improvements worth,—
What all the broad philosophy of earth,—
What earth itself, redeemed and beautified,
With light and harmony from heaven supplied,—
What life, with its capacities, its hopes, its art,—
Without the faith and love of woman's heart ?

IV.

Like earth in winter in its snow-shroud laid,
Its bloom and beauty blighted and decayed ;
Like night without the stars, obscure and cold ;
Like morn with all its tempest-clouds unrolled ;
Like noon without the sun, a cheerless scowl ;
Like eve without the twilight, blank and foul ;
Like plants without their fragrance or their bloom,
Of light and hope and loveliness the tomb,
With naught his deep despondence to beguile,—
Were man, bereft of woman's cheerful smile.
The wealth of all earth's jewelry and gold ;
The fearful power the sciences unfold ;
The irresistible command of all
The vast capacity of this revolving ball ;

To reach of life's attainments all that's human,—
Were naught, without the sympathy of woman.
A wayside hut, a table scant and rude,
The dungeon's shame, the desert's solitude,
Contempt and ignominy, pains and wrongs,
The sufferance that to poverty belongs,
The crushing weight of fortune's furious mood,
Man's heart can bear, with woman's faith indued.
Without that faith and love of woman born,
Man were an outcast, aimless and forlorn;
With woman and her attributes divine,
Grandeur and virtue in his soul combine.

V.

My theme is her whom all the earth reveres;
Woman! who wins with smiles, subdues with tears,
And, as the sunlight gives the flowers their hues,
With grace and purity man's heart imbues;—
Woman, to whom imperious man resigns,
And her sweet image in his heart enshrines;
To whom, though proud as he were lord of all—
Though his strong arm her weakness could appal—
He yields, as icicles in winter's sunshine fall.
Of entertainment and instruction full,
The poet, if the theme prove trite and dull,
Must take for his stupidity the blame;
The subject might a seraph's tongue inflame,

Awaken wonder in celestial ears,
And hold more listeners than the tuneful spheres.

But what is Woman? in her true estate,
Amid earth's dwellers, what her rank and fate?
How is she classed? what unit represents
Her proper and generic lineaments?
Compare the billows on the foaming sea,
When summer winds break up its unity;
Each green and sparkling fragment is a billow,
But how unlike in form and kind its fellow;—
Strike on the harp, it yields a pleasing sound,
That seems, so true the harmony is found,
One simple tone; but many concords meet,
And some few discords, in the cadence sweet;—
Not more a child is all unlike his brother,
Not more the wood leaves differ from each other,
Not more the books upon a stationer's shelf,
Than curious woman differs from herself.
But books and billows may be classified,
And why not woman?—'t is a task untried,
For she is changeable in will and mind,
As some say, like the moon, as others, like the wind;
Sometimes in smiles, sometimes in tears is seen,
In form and beauty earth's unrivaled queen;
Sometimes as gentle as a summer's morn,
Sometimes as rough as waves by whirlwinds torn;

Sometimes a Xanthippe, sometimes a Ruth;
Sometimes a dove, sometimes a viper's tooth;
Sometimes a radiant angelic creature,
Serenity and love in every feature;
Sometimes a fury's rage her hair dishevels,
And her sweet temper changes to a devil's.
Be calm—though harsh, the judgment is but candid;
With the same iron, man a demon's branded.
But there are those whose calm benignant souls
An all-enduring constancy controls;
Who under woe and wrong's extremest blight
Shine like the diamond's undying light:
Soft gentle creatures, with exhaustless store
"Of qualities that man loves woman for;"
Light-giving stars in life's dark canopy,
Of man's rough soul the strength and chivalry;
Imperfect, till his rugged traits comprise
The love that streams through woman from the skies,—
With that inspired, all peril he defies,
Upon his mission like an eagle flies,
And stands undaunted, let what may assail;
For who has Woman's love can never fail.

VI.

But what is Woman? still the question stays
Unanswered, while my muse discursive strays.

I half am tempted candidly to say
At once, I can not tell, and yield the day.
I can not say, in Byron's sneering strain,
That she is weak, and finical, and vain;
Or with the poet of the world, that she
"Never goes right," like clocks from Germany;
Or with the rhyming critic cry, in gall,
"Most women have no character at all;"
I can not say her intellect is strong
To seize the right and reprobate the wrong;
Or that her heart to pity is inclined,
And melts like salt to season all mankind;
Or that she is unstable, like the sea,
Or, like the stars, all light and purity;—
Can not, because the subject is not single:
For as kaleidescopic figures mingle,
Vanish, and change, each time the tube is turned,
So woman, in the aggregate discerned,
As one compound and comprehensive class,
Presents, much like the image in the glass,
Such involutions, aspects new and strange,
Such wonderful facility of change,
Such sparkling contrasts, such dissimilar tones
Of strength and color, such odd lines and zones,—
That 't were impossible in one broad view
Full justice in a field so large to do.
Earth's plains with gay and gorgeous flowers abound —
Legions of bubbles dance on the deep profound —

The arch of night with silver stars is full —
In winter comes the snow, like scattered wool —
The forests bear unnumbered twinkling leaves —
Uncounted cloudy forms the eye perceives ;
But of the clouds, the leaves, the stars, the flowers,
The bubbles and the snow-flakes, though in showers,
In groups and masses, they the vision fill,
Each has its form and single beauty still ;
And every individual flower and flake,
Each leaf and star, its proper rank must take
In nature's scale of loveliness, and shine
Admired and praised, or in neglect decline :
Thus every Woman has a charm and grace
As singly hers, as is her form and face ;
Though all together by a common chain are linked,
Still each is individual and distinct ;
And yet, so many in one mold are cast,
They may, like stars and flowers, be grouped and classed.
Let a few random specimens suffice ;
I 'll study to be candid and concise.

VII.

See, first, the Frivolous Woman, whose light head contains
More tongue than wit, more glistening teeth than brains ;
Who when the sun four hours upon the world
His broad and flaming banner has unfurled,

All tricked and trimmed with gewgaws gilt and gay,
Begins the empty routine of the day;
In life no purpose, as in sense no share,
She little has to do with task or care;
She idly might some trifling trinket make,
But would e'en that for cards or dice forsake;
'Twixt yarn and thread the difference can discern,
But in their art or use feels no concern;
She reads, a lonely moment to beguile,
But 'tis to learn of dress the latest style;
Or, wrapt in tearful sympathy and dole,
To mourn Amanda's bitterness of soul;
Or else, with dosing head to contemplate
The simpering forms of Godey's fashion plate.
She speaks — a hail-storm, pattering on the glass,
In unity and method would surpass
Her incoherent rattle — search were vain,
To find in her discourse the point or chain:
She like the magpie chatters all the day,
But, like the magpie, nothing has to say.
In one absorbing purpose warm and zealous,
To make her dearest Georgiana jealous;
Of her ambition the sublimest top,
Is to be fanned and followed by a fop,
And crammed with sweetmeats from the pastry shop.

VIII.

How the Strong-minded Woman's nervous tongue
Would havoc make such mincing chits among!
Feed her on cakes and comfits? Just as soon
Feed great Goliath with a porridge spoon.
Amuse her mind with trifles? Rather say
If Russia's Cæsar would with puppets play.
Strong meat for her; and books whose gnarled lines
And thoughts like interlocked and knotted pines,
Will yield their toughness to no puny stroke,
But stout, resistless, crashing blows provoke.
Strong minded women, like steam-boilers, hold
Terrific power; most safe when most controlled;—
No cunning craftiness of man's device,
No poor cajolery can them entice;
They 've thought, read, reasoned, seen, indeed they know,
And what they know all earth can not o'erthrow;
In hoops of iron their sturdy firmness binds
The keen convictions of their keener minds.
They condescend to scandal with a few,
But check it with a lofty look in you;
Cry, Fie! and summon candor to their aid,
Yet bend their ear to learn what scandal said;
Though mostly their portentous converse bears
On kings and congresses and state affairs.

The argument, however false or weak,
Man yields in silence when they write or speak;
No honor's chaplets on such fields are won —
Woman is certain, and the strife is done;
E'en smooth and courteous words no favor bring —
Like nettles, touch them gently and they sting.
The dew of woman's loveliness must vanish
Beneath the brazen glare of traits so mannish;
And man, as from a fractured mirror, turns,
And, thus distorted, his own image spurns.

IX.

The Dismal Woman next before me stands,
Wringing with doleful weariness her hands;
Her head in sad vibrations, to and fro,
Rocks with a hopeless all-denying no:
No peace, no health, no good, no luck, no right,
All is confusion, darkness, doubt and night;
Invectives, like the porcupine's sharp quills,
Dart from her lips, as grief her bosom fills.
Her life is one incessant apprehension
Of some great evil, of complex invention,
Coming to crush her in its monstrous walk,
As behemoth o'er a wounded deer might stalk.
Upon her gloomy visage sits, austere,
A joy-abandoned and contemptuous sneer;

Earth has no sunshine for her misty eye ;
Each cloud that rolls in beauty on the sky,
Is fraught with terror, storm and death to her ;
And every step is o'er a sepulchre.
There's nothing fair and beautiful, but she
Some fault and failing in its make can see ;
For every blessing there's a thousand wants,
And every pleasant spot some mischief haunts :
At night, through every bolted window stalks a thief ;
By day, a snake hides under every leaf ;—
Her present life is loaded with distress,
Propose a change—she groans in bitterness ;
She languishes in dust and smoke in town,
The stupid country would her misery crown ;
The present, is a miscontrived affair—
The future, fraught with unalloyed despair.
She hourly o'er her self-made cares repines,
And, like a peevish school-girl, frets and whines
At some delirious and preposterous whim,
That like a spectre, vapory and grim,
Torments by day and importunes by night,
And all life's cheerful sunshine veils from sight.
Her sad condition bears this double weight,
That fancied troubles real ones aggravate :
She may be pitied, laughed at, if you please,
But heaven itself could not her fretful soul appease.

X.

The Tattling Woman must not here escape.
She comes in no obscure or doubtful shape ;
There 's not a city or a country town,
But knows the very flutter of her gown.
Her head is full of tales, in confidence
To her related, at some friend's expense ;
Her tongue is swift to execute and mar,
No snake can cast its venom half so far ;
It neither innocence nor friendship spares,
But with a scorpion's subtile sting compares ;
It adds to lies their father would disown,
Of spite and malice the more damning tone ;
Her smile is like the smile Belzoni saw
Upon the crocodile's indented jaw.
Her ear is like the Maelstrom's vortex vast,
Where characters in shattered wrecks are cast,
And drawn resistless down the whirling pool,
The good and wise confounded with the fool ;—
Her eyes, stout walls and doors can penetrate,
And with clairvoyant accuracy relate
What never was and never could be seen,
Save by detraction's falsehood-loving queen ;
Save by that power in tattling woman found,
A fact of idle guesses to compound.

Though some few truths she may by chance let go,
As a blind archer sometimes kills a crow,—
Better to meet a viper in your walk,
Than this base peddler of calumnious talk:
Better a highwayman who steals your cash,
And less deserves correction's wholesome lash.

XI

The Independent Woman steps before
The crowd that throngs around my closet door,
And clamors to be heard; her voice is loud,
And humbler spirits shrink, abashed and cowed.
Her talk is of conventions, and the blessed right
Of woman, in her sovereignty and might,
Regardless of the laughter of the throng,
To do just what she pleases, right or wrong.
Her pockets are crammed full of resolutions,
Schemes of reform, amended constitutions,
With quires of notes, prolific and profuse,
Of plans her galling fetters to unloose;
And projects to enfranchise woman's soul
From ignominious man's insane control.
She is no bigot, but each lecturer heard,
Holds with the last in doctrine and in word;
Takes dross for gold at each impostor's hand,
Sooner than o'er the fining furnace stand;

And as chamelions take the nearest hues,
The newest creed intrepidly pursues.

Her husband—Ah! excuse this "foolish tear"—
But mixed emotions, pitiful and queer,
Possess my soul whene'er on him I look.
He once—I 've known him so—as well could brook
Derision's finger, or dishonor's gibe,
As that another should the course prescribe
Of his volitions, movements, step and stand;
But now, the strict and technical command
Of his fair Amazon his will supplies,
And he, poor man, connubially dies;
Subdued and gentle as a petted cat,
He nothing counts his own, but boots and hat.
One day—the story is of recent date—
Returning to his dinner rather late,
He met within the hall, as in he walked,
All strapped and buckled, ticketed and chalked,
A pile of trunks, with Strong upon them seated,
Who with an ivory grin his master greeted.
"What's this," he cried, "what means this strange array?"
"That Mistress, Sir, to Paris goes to-day."
"To Paris, Strong?"—"To Paris, so she said, Sir;
Her passage, per the Baltic, I have paid, Sir."
"'T is strange—but, tell me, did you hear her, Strong,
Say anything of taking *me* along?"

As chairman of some indignation meeting,
Where sister Susan, injured lamb, is bleating
Of wrongs and suffrages, she sits sublime,
Amongst life's regulators, prim and prime ;
And more can tell of England's trade and stocks,
Than of her children's ragged coats and socks.
She walks with stately and imperious tread,
With all her sails and flying streamers spread ;
Leaves the pure paths of peace and modesty,
To show how brave and lawless she can be.
Neglected her still fireside duties leaves,
And some great folly publicly achieves ;
Ascends the rostrum, or with swaggering air,
In kind replying to the lounger's stare,
Steps toward the ballot-box with lordly stride,
And asks to vote, her sex to set aside :—
Doing, in fine, with bold unblushing face,
A thousand feats her virtue to disgrace,
She grieves the good, amuses the profane,
And where she looked for favor, finds disdain.
Her life produced,—thus reads her epitaph,—
Some grains of wheat, with baskets-full of chaff ;
She gained the approbation and support
Of certain parasites of kindred sort,
But more and more bewildered day by day,
In aimless projects wore her life away.
At heaven's gate her blows the keeper shocks,
An empty echo answers all her knocks.

XII.

The Scolding Woman, with a stormy scowl,
Here bursts upon me, but her angry growl
Shall not disturb me ;—let her rage have vent,
The screaming wind 't were folly to resent.
Such frantic blustering wakens little fear,
I can not waste more words upon it here.
Not Hecla, when its glowing top outpours
The smoking lava, and its thunder roars,
Such tumult to such little purpose makes,
As scolding woman, when her wrath awakes ;
There's rage enough and roar enough, 't is true,
A little startling if too near you view ;
But from a point of safety if you gaze,
There's really nothing fearful in the blaze.

XIII.

To Fashion's Votary, if you do not doze,
Let me direct your glance before I close ;
A creature like a humming-bird arrayed,
Of plumes and perfumes, lace and lacings made.
Consistency is banished from her creed,
She fashion chides, yet follows fashion's lead ;

She owns it is absurd, yet makes the change,
Wondering the while the world endures such strange
And frightful forms; but very soon recants,
And what her milliner devises grants.
'T is said that she to custom but adheres,
And who with custom's mandates interferes?
But what is custom? let me ask of those,
Whose gallantry would this defense propose.
Custom is woman's creature, pet and tool,
Without her voice one hour she could not rule;
Custom's a child, six months with life entangled,
And then by its inconstant mother strangled;
What woman chooses, sanctions and permits,
That is the custom, and the world submits:
Upon her throne her facile queen she places,
And though the favorite she soon disgraces—
While the brief sceptre in her hand remains,
Her reign upholds, her vagaries sustains;
But just as warmly, when her term expires,
To prostrate every ordinance conspires.
Custom is woman's agent; *she*'s the slave,
Woman's the mistress, valiant to outbrave
Opinion, censure, ridicule and talk,
And in her own sufficiency to walk.
Is it not so? How else are styles adjusted?
Was man with woman's costume ever trusted?
If woman chose her tortured limbs to free,
Who could compel her hand to let them be?

Not man, most surely, who so hard has tried
To have a girdle too abridged untied ;
Who from a pair of slight Celestial feet,
Compressed and tortured to look slim and neat,
Would long ago have loosed the cramping shoes
But that their owners held opposing views ;
Who with his penknife, had he had his way,
Would with a shout of joy, have given play
To many a heart, restrained in bars of bone,
And doomed in cords and bands to pant and groan ;
But willful woman would not have it so,
Determined down the path of death to go.
Ah ! many a freakish, weakly thing we see
In her who fashion's sport consents to be ;
A wasp, a churn, a jackdaw if she pleases,
Her plastic form, to imitate, she squeezes ;
No matter what deformity ensues,
Her ribs into the reigning shape she screws ;
Giddy and fickle, common sense she quits,
And to be governed by the mode submits.
Simplicity, poor shrinking maid, she spurns,
And out of doors reproving Prudence turns ;
Wraps to the chin to meet a morning call,
But goes less modest to a public ball ;
Her shoulders leaves exposed to winter's sleet,
And sweeps with draggling skirts the dusty street :
At home appears in careless comeliness,
But for a soirée thus transforms the dress—

Into fantastic shapes her garments weaves,
And like a laundress rolls up both her sleeves;
About her throws on strings of ribbon strung,
And in a maze of loops and festoons hung,
An aboriginal profusion, over neck and arms,
Of jingling jewels, chains and tinsel charms;
Contracts the upper margin of her dress,
And makes the sum of human ignorance less
By such an anatomical display
Of joints and bones and jutting vertebræ,
As might a demonstrator's class elate,
But scarce the sculptor's heart would captivate.

XIV.

She still would seem, upon life's middle stage,
A child in all save innocence and age;
Will simpering sip her cup of sugared water,
And share Malvolio's homage with her daughter:
Pleased with the adulations of the fool,
Will flirt and fidget by some mincing rule,
And prove by many a foolish thing how low
The degradation of her mind may go.
She lives outside, and nothing has within;
No deeper beauty than her painted skin;
Home pleasure and home comforts e'en are sold,
To hang her house in tapestry and gold.

Her neighbor opposite exults in walls
Of inlaid porcelain, and her morning calls
Are answered in a boudoir draped with silk
As frail as gossamer, and white as milk:
No peace by day has she, no sleep by night,
Planning some hanging that shall outdo quite
Her neighbor's boudoir; constant in one aim
The town's applause or envy to inflame,
It matters not if sneers or smiles she gains,
To be notorious she her genius strains.
Oppressed and nervous, should she find, at last,
Her late extravagance has been surpassed,
She changes ground, adopts a bolder style,
And tries some new absurdity awhile,—
New hangs her curtains, and new paints her doors,
And spreads new colors on her parlor floors;
And thus, poor woman, half her lifetime spends
In making for the other half amends:
But each experiment still ends the same,
And disappointment adds acuteness to her shame.
Friends, and the joy that from their union springs,
She reckons not among the trivial things
That her contentment and vocation make:
Her neighbors eat and criticise her cake,
And simpering fops, when short of money, slake
Their thirst from her decanters, now and then,
And for the liquor may drop in again;

And at her door a liveried footman rings
Sometimes, who in an empty carriage brings
A printed card — an annual compliment,
By some fair parasite politely sent,
To signify she hopes her well and hearty,
And won't forget her at the approaching party:
And this is all she knows of friendship — this
The sum and climax of her earthly bliss;
What else she hopes beyond, 't were hard to say,
Of one who looks no farther than to-day.
But let us on the picture look no more,
Kind Charity her veil the creature drops before.

XV.

And is this all of Woman? — this the prize
For which the angels left th' eternal skies?
Is this the gift proclaimed Heaven's last and best,
Of man's existence the delight and zest?
Little of her unmeasured worth he knows,
Who Woman's name on such as these bestows!
These are the *ignis-fatui* that inspire
The undiscerning, and that fools admire;
The lesser lights, whose brief unsteady ray
The weak and thoughtless lead in folly's way;
Women, not woman — exceptions, not the type:
I haste from woman's name these blots to wipe.

Woman—TRUE WOMAN—still demands your ear;
True woman, man's companion and compeer;
Whose cheek receives of life the infant breath,
Who lingers last around the couch of death,
"Celestial peace still pictured in her look,
As heaven's blue image in the smiling brook;"
Whose heart in life's glad moments fond and weak,
When dangers press throws courage in her cheek;
Who has this strength, all other strength above,
The wondrous "power to suffer and to love;"
Who, when by trial and desertion bowed,
Nobly "instructs her sorrows to be proud;"
Whose queenly "beauty masters the most strong,"
And lives in warrior's deeds and poet's song.

Her patriotism, like the beacon lights
That burned on Scotia's brown and craggy heights,
Not only warns when treachery walks in arms,
But strength inspires when danger most alarms;
And stands with Saragossa's daring maid,
Where brothers, husbands, stiff in death are laid.
Her fortitude can all earth's woe endure,
And stand, in every peril, strong and sure;
Neglect and disappointment bear with smiles,
And most forgive where falsehood most reviles.

Upon the broad untraveled deep, that rolled,
In dark December's bleak and blust'ring cold,
Its icy billows on old Plymouth's shore,
Her cheering voice, soft blending with the roar
Of wind and wave, made soothing harmony,
Like peaceful oil poured on the angry sea:
And most we honor of that noble band,
The pilgrim mothers of our native land.
Upon the rugged frontier, where, by night,
The hungry barking wolf put sleep to flight,
And all the day, cruel and pitiless,
The savage filled the lonely wilderness
With untold terror, there her daring heart
Took in the peril and the fear its part:
She there the struggling woodman stood beside,
Or nobly o'er his mangled body died.

Her truthfulness, by innocence upheld,
Is by no other attribute excelled:
Temptation's wiles dare not with it contend,
And all earth's torture can not break or bend;
It throws majestic beauty in her face,
The outward working of an inward grace.
She once, in helplessness, implored the aid
Of Him who never could the weak upbraid;
Her fervent gaze she fixed upon the sky,
And with its truth Heaven filled her kindling eye;

An ever-living radiance thence it streamed,
Fair as the star o'er Bethlehem's babe that beamed,
To shine forever, set with heavenly art,
A jewel from the cabinet of her heart.

XVI.

A graceful charm o'er all her movements thrown,
Imparts to life that elegance and tone,
That, like the sunlight on the evening sky,
Its clouds and shadows warm and beautify.
Her gentleness man's vehemence subdues,
And his stern soul with tenderness imbues;
Leads him from folly, rescues him from crime,
And fills his heart with sympathies sublime.
Her goodness is an overflowing well,
Whose pure exhaustless waters gush and swell,
In bubbling freshness, from affection's fount,
In full, sufficient, measureless amount;
To raise the fallen, make the friendless glad,
Soothe the distressed, and animate the sad;
To be to man, when sorrows to him cling,
What to the desert is the way-side spring—
What to the prostrate and unsheltered flower,
Is the cool dropping of the summer shower.
Her place is home; her care is for the few
That cluster round the hearth-stone and pursue

The joys and duties that concentre there ;
Chilled by no rude and uncongenial air
From the rank fields of politics and strife,
That taints the current of man's stormy life —
Vexed by no questions of unstaid reform,
Or schemes her higher nature to deform,—
A secret influence there around her streams,
As sweet and pure as morn's refreshing beams.

Her piety is like the breath of spring,
Pure as the incense that the young flowers fling
In lavish gratitude upon the air ;
Still as the whisper of a child's first prayer,
Deep as the yearning of a mother's breast,
And humble as in heaven the newest guest ;
Within her conscious soul 't is planted fast,
As hope's firm anchor in its haven cast ;
An efficacious, life-sustaining truth,
In age as joy-inspiring as in youth ;
That brings from Heaven, in trial's fearful night,
The oil that keeps the lamp of virtue bright.
Like a flower without its perfume, or a tree
Without its vital sap, would woman be,
In no ennobling trait or virtue poor,
In goodness and intelligence mature,
In life as spotless as an angel's thought,
Without the piety that Jesus taught.

XVII.

True woman has a rich possession still,
Which challenges the pen's consummate skill;
I can but name it—time forbids me more;
I mean her heart's abundant mint and store
Of love—transcendent, life-enduring love—
Whose source, whose strength, whose hope is from above;
That like a flower, in hues of heaven drest,
Serenely blooms within her quiet breast,
Sweetening her thoughts, and with its mild control,
Molding the peaceful passions of her soul.
'Tis woman's central, life-diffusing sun,
Round which her graceful virtues circling run;
She lives to love;—as she herself has said,
It is her whole existence; rich to spread
O'er cold and want its most enlivening glow,
As brightest shines the sun on winter's snow.

XVIII.

Such, in your poet's trite but honest view,
Too coldly pictured, is the high and true
"Divine perfection of a woman;"—earth
Has but one treasure of such priceless worth.

True woman, as a warm unfaltering *friend*,
Enduring toil, her energies will bend
To succor and encourage the distrest,
And give the weary and desponding rest;
To caution and deter from error's way
The heart to passion or despair a prey; —
As a kind *sister*, gentle and sincere,
In sympathy will lend her trusty ear
To all that can a brother's lot concern,
And to assuage his slightest sorrow yearn; —
Still more her sympathies expand and glow,
When from a *mother's* anxious heart they flow;
Still more her energies are nerved to bear
A mother's never half-requited care;
Still more in love and joy her soul exults,
When from that care a peaceful life results.
But to the heart of man more dear than these,
Dearer than all ear hears or vision sees
Of lovely things in woman to admire,
His soul with manly rapture to inspire,
Is the fidelity, the care, the love,
Distrust and self so generously above,
The calm devotion and the watchful zeal,
Serene and patient through life's woe and weal,
The thousand graces that exalt the life
Of her who bears the sacred name of WIFE.

XIX.

Fair maidens, let me add a word, to say
To you, whose looks and smiles the doubts betray
That in your true and trusting spirits lurk,
That much of what I 've sketched, is but the work
Of Fancy, fruitful source of all the dreams
With which the poet's phrensied cranium teems;
That such — or to no purpose I have striven
To learn the lessons life thus far has given —
Such, and thus oddly, curiously endowed,
So fickle or so firm, so humble or so proud,
So loveable or laughable, is she
Whom you must soon, in some relation, be.
Such are the blossoms of your buds of hope
That will in life's maturer season ope,
Expanding into flowers to grace or shame
The high possession of a woman's name.

XX.

All character, in well instructed minds,
Results from choice and plan; the wayward winds
Of whim, caprice and fashion mold the weak,
Who, like the clouds, no stabler guidance seek.
But those who think — observe, compare and weigh;
And to their hearts all things they see convey

Instruction, hints, examples, warnings, guides,
While prudence, from the good, the bad divides.
Thus may you all your models choose with care,
And in the wisdom of the thoughtful share ;
And let this precept, on your hearts imprest,
The moral of my long discourse attest.
The truth to love, and foolishness to shun ;
To leave no duty in your sphere undone ;
By no seductive cant to be misled ;
But with your heel to bruise the tempter's head ;—
To lose or peril not in deed or thought,
For what some false reformer may have taught,
Your faith, your purity, your God, your soul,
Of your responsibility sums up the whole :
Be honest with yourselves, and with your God,
And o'er your peaceful path shall ever nod,
Profuse in beauty and in fragrance rife,
The sheltering branches of the tree of life.

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